

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SHIUX FALLS NATIONAL GUARD UNITS TO DEPLOY TO AFRICA

Two Sioux Falls-based South Dakota Army National Guard units have received a mobilization order for an eight month deployment to Africa beginning in late August and early September.

More than 190 soldiers with the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and nearly 40 soldiers with the 115th Signal Company will deploy to Djibouti to support U.S. Africa Command in support of allied nation partnerships and regional security and stability goals.

The 196th MEB will deploy in late August and will command and control assigned units and support the security, mobility, and functional operations of forces in a designated region.

The 115th SC will deploy in early September and provide operational support and management of communication and information systems to a supported brigade.

The units will report to Fort Hood, Texas, to complete several weeks of theater-specific training prior to deployment overseas.

The South Dakota National Guard's primary values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage and excellence in all we do.



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VA ANNOUNCES FOURTH MISSION ACTIONS TO HELP AMERICA RESPOND TO COVID-19

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced several actions it has taken to help all Americans during the COVID-19 outbreak.

“The VA is committed to helping the nation in this effort to combat COVID-19,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Helping veterans is our first mission, but in many locations across the country we’re helping states and local communities. The VA is in this fight not only for the millions of veterans we serve each day; we’re in the fight for the people of the United States.”

The VA traditionally provides veterans’ healthcare, benefits and memorial affairs. In times of national crisis, such as the current Coronavirus pandemic, the VA provides services to the nation based on requests from states, while being clear that veterans are first. This is known as the VA’s Fourth Mission.

The VA has determined to make 1,500 beds available for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These beds will be a combination of acute care and intensive care beds for non-veteran patients available at various VA locations around the country.

The VA is caring for dozens of non-veteran patients for COVID-19 across the country, pursuant to requests from FEMA and as part of the emergency response effort. As of this week, the VA has treated non-veterans in the following locations:

- VA New York Harbor (New York: 80 patients, 30 discharges, five deaths.
- VA New Jersey: 24 patients, six discharges, one death.
- VA Ann Arbor, Michigan: 17 patients, five discharges, no deaths.
- VA Detroit, Michigan: 10 patients, two discharges, no deaths.
- VA Albuquerque, New Mexico: four patients, one discharge.

The VA continues to accept mission assignments from FEMA to open beds for non-veteran patients, after a determination is made that care to veterans will not be disrupted.

The VA is caring for people in nursing homes who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 due to age or pre-existing medical conditions.

The VA is reaching people where they live, by getting their resources to where people need them. States that require assistance from the VA should request it through their local Department of Health and Human Services Regional Emergency Coordinator — part of FEMA’s National Response Coordination Center. Counties, cities, and other municipalities should route all requests for federal support through their respective states.

The VA continues to encourage veterans, staff members, and their families to [take precautions](#) to protect against respiratory illnesses caused by COVID-19, the flu and the common cold, and to follow the guidance of their local and state health care and emergency management officials.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CLAIMS TRACKER NOW AVAILABLE

The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) has added a feature to allow unemployment insurance claimants to track the status of their initial claim online any time.

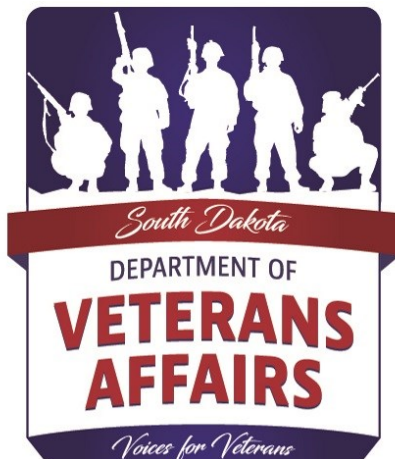
“The status will show in green on the main screen when a claimant is logged in,” said state Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman. “We are hoping this new feature will reduce calls to our call center, as this has been a frequent question.”

To ensure benefits are paid as quickly as possible, claimants need to enter correct and current personal information, such as Social Security numbers, birthdates, addresses and bank accounts. Incorrect information will result in a delay of benefit payment.

“Remember, to be paid, claimants need to file a weekly request for payment, even though the work search requirement is currently waived,” said Secretary Hultman. “Claimants can see the status of their weekly request for payment by clicking on Payment History.”

Unemployment claimants filing a weekly request for benefits should call 605-626-3212 after 6 p.m. CDT, or file online at RAclaims.sd.gov. Visit <https://bit.ly/Ulpayment> to view video tutorials on how to file a weekly request for payment and other tips, quick links and options available.

SDDVA TO HOST MINI CONFERENCE VIA SKYPE



SDDVA will be hosting their Spring Mini Conference via Skype. The conference will be held Tuesday, May 19, from 10:00 am (CT) - 2:00 pm (CT). Pack your lunch and your popcorn snack!!!!

Presentations will include: VA Healthcare, State Veterans Home update on admissions process, benefits by percentage, and pension. Staff will also address issues relating to benefits and COVID-19.

Invitation for the conference will be emailed soon.

NEW PROCEDURES FOR WITNESSING INTERMENTS AT VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

All Department of Veterans Affairs' national cemeteries remain open and continue to provide interment for veterans and eligible individuals during this health crisis. As you are aware, on March 23rd the National Cemetery Administration temporarily discontinued committal services while continuing to allow families to witness their loved ones' interments (up to 10 individuals).

The VA seeks continued assistance in ensuring that those who are visiting national cemeteries as witnesses are aware of CDC and local guidelines intended to protect health and safety. CDC guidance is available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/> Please emphasize with families that the CDC recommends those individuals who are not feeling well, have been exposed to someone who is COVID positive, or have received a COVID positive diagnosis to not leave their homes except to get medical care and to not visit public areas.

NCA is offering all families the option to postpone the interment, or to proceed with the interment and provide a memorial service at a later date. Families choosing to witness should also understand NCA staff are closely following CDC guidelines on social distancing, to include maintaining safe distances and using personal protective equipment such as face masks and gloves.

Effective, Wednesday, April 15, 2020, to ensure social distancing at the cemetery, witnessing family members will now be asked to view the interment from their cars or the road very near their cars. Families may visit the gravesite in the days following the interment consistent with CDC guidelines and local travel restrictions.



VA VIRTUAL MENTAL HEALTH CARE USE ON THE RISE AMID COVID-19

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues, daily, to deliver quality and timely mental health care to veterans, even as the COVID-19 pandemic has made traveling to VA facilities complex.

VA staff data shows a dramatic jump in virtual mental health care services in March, a sign veterans are successfully accessing care despite the challenges the pandemic has presented. [VA Video Connect](#) allows veterans to consult with their healthcare provider via their computer, tablet, or phone. Also, during March, mental health providers completed more than 34,000 appointments with veterans using VA Video Connect, an increase of 70% from the 20,000 appointments made in February, before the pandemic. Here's a breakdown of the increases.

- Telehealth group therapy conducted more than 2,700 visits in March, a jump of more than 200% from the prior month.
 - Mental health care and consultation delivered by phone rose to more than 154,000 appointments in March, up 280% from the 40,000 appointments in February.
 - Vet Centers across the nation held more than 47,000 virtual appointments in March, a 200% increase from February.
- These counseling sessions dealt with mental health issues.

Mental health care is especially important during stressful times such as these and the VA invites veterans to take advantage of the care they've earned. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said the numbers show VA has made a quick adjustment to ensure ongoing support to veterans during these difficult times.

"The VA is open for business and we continue to provide same-day mental health services and mental health screening for veterans at-risk who require attention at any of our facilities," said Wilkie. "There is no doubt the VA's early embrace of new technology is aiding veterans and I applaud the VA health care workers and veteran patients for embracing it."

Veterans interested in learning more about scheduling a telehealth appointment can read the [latest VA information about the Coronavirus and mental health](#).

Veterans looking to connect to local VA staff by phone [can find their closest VA facility here](#). For veterans in crisis or those who are concerned, help is available at the [Veterans Crisis Line](#): 1-800-273-8255, and press 1, or text 838255, or chat www.VeteransCrisisLine.net.

For more information about the VA's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how procedures have changed at your local VA, [click here](#).



UPDATE FROM SOCIAL SECURITY COMMISSIONER

“The Treasury Department launched a new web tool allowing quick registration for Economic Impact Payments for eligible individuals who do not normally file a tax return, and also announced that it would begin making automatic payments.

However, for some people receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration--specifically those who have dependent children under the age of 17--it is to their advantage to go to this portal to ensure they also get the \$500 per dependent Economic Impact Payment. I encourage them to do this as soon as possible, and want to provide the following details:

People who receive Social Security retirement, survivors, or disability insurance benefits and who did not file a tax return for 2018 or 2019 and who have qualifying children under age 17 should now go to the IRS's webpage at www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments to enter their information instead of waiting for their automatic \$1,200 Economic Impact Payment.

By taking proactive steps to enter information on the IRS website about them and their qualifying children, they will also receive the \$500 per dependent child payment in addition to their \$1,200 individual payment. If Social Security beneficiaries in this group do not provide their information to the IRS soon, they will have to wait to receive their \$500 per qualifying child.

The same new guidance also applies to SSI recipients, especially those who have qualifying children under age 17. To receive the full amount of the Economic Impact Payments you and your family are eligible for, go to the IRS's *Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info* page at www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments and provide information about yourself and your qualifying children.

Additionally, any new beneficiaries since January 1, 2020, of either Social Security or SSI benefits, who did not file a tax return for 2018 or 2019, will also need to go to the IRS's *Non-Filers* website to enter their information.

Lastly, for Social Security retirement, survivors, or disability beneficiaries who do not have qualifying children under age 17, you do not need to take any action with the IRS. You will automatically receive your \$1,200 economic impact payment directly from the IRS as long as you received an SSA-1099 for 2019.



NEW WAY TO SIGN UP FOR MEDICARE PART B

As of March 17, 2020, all local Social Security offices have been closed to the public for in-person service due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They understand that due to current circumstances, beneficiaries may have difficulties submitting their Medicare enrollment forms by mail.

To assist beneficiaries who have stopped working and are seeking immediate enrollment into Medicare Part B, they have developed a method for beneficiaries to fax their enrollment forms.

Now Medicare beneficiaries can fax Medicare Part B form, CMS-40B and CMS L564- Request for Employment Information, along with proof of employment, Group Health Plan (GHP), or Large Group Health Plan (LGHP) to **1-833-914-2016**, if unable to mail the forms directly to their local Social Security office. To find your local office mailing address, please use the Social Security Office Locator.



Securing today
and tomorrow

Please visit Social Security & Coronavirus information page to get updates on the latest, including how to get help from the Social Security Administration by phone and online.

SECRETARY WILKIE THANKS WOUNDED WARRIORS

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Secretary Robert Wilkie praised the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) on April 10, for its generous donation of \$10 million to assist veterans experiencing a financial crisis due to COVID-19.

"Coronavirus is disrupting daily American life, but WWP's incredible contribution shows the American spirit is alive and stronger than ever," Wilkie said. "This commitment does more than aid thousands of our warriors when they need it most – it inspires all of us to help our friends and neighbors through this unsettling time."

WWP is asking foundations and companies in the private sector to match its commitment, and Wilkie urged any who can to contribute to this noble effort.

"These heroes risked everything when their nation called, and now it's time for everyone to hear their call," he said. "WWP has my deep thanks and appreciation for this gesture."

HEMPEL NAMED NEW STATE AMERICAN LEGION ADJUTANT

District 7 Vice Commander Kevin Hempel has been selected as the American Legion State Adjutant.

Kevin Hempel was born in Webster and raised in Pierre and Sioux Falls. He graduated from Lincoln Senior High School in Sioux Falls and attended South Dakota State University where he received a BS in Sociology. He attended Navy Officer Candidate School and was commissioned an Ensign in 1981. He retired as a Captain with over 30 years of service. During his time in the Navy, he served on seven different ships and a number of senior staffs, earned a MS in administration and served in five different command billets. After retiring he attended Vermont Woodworking School where he earned a certification in furniture making, then returned to the Sioux Falls area where he and his wife started a custom furniture business.

Hempel became a Legionnaire in 2014 by joining Post 15. He quickly became active serving as the post adjutant, 2nd vice commander, 1st vice commander and commander for 2018-2019. In 2019 he was elected as the vice commander for District 7 and chairman of the Department training team.

UPDATES FROM THE AMERICAN LEGION

Due to COVID-19, the State American Legion has cancelled South Dakota Boys State, Youth Trooper Academy, Spring district meetings, district commanders seminar, and the state convention.

In addition, the national convention has been cancelled.

For you on line shoppers -- Amazon.com has a feature where they will donate money to your favorite charity that is a 501c3. The South Dakota American Legion Foundation is one of these charities. By going to <https://smile.amazon.com/> you can shop from this site and 1% of your shopping will be donated to the Foundation if you select the "South Dakota American Legion Foundation" as your charity.



VA, FACEBOOK, AND AMERICAN RED CROSS PROVIDE VIDEO CALLING

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began making Portal from Facebook devices available, April 15, to veterans and their caregivers and families to reduce isolation and improve social connectedness at home.

In support of veterans' mental health and social connection, the VA partnered with Facebook to provide more than 7,400 devices, while the [American Red Cross Military Veteran Caregiver Network](#) will store and ship them to [qualifying](#) veterans in pairs.

The partnership was initiated by the [PREVENTS](#) office which is charged with supporting the Executive Order task force responsible for the development and implementation of the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide.

"Veterans, families and caregivers will benefit through an increased support system," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Our goal is for veterans to feel less isolated through more communication. We believe this technology will help veterans who might otherwise be unreachable."

Those participating in one of VA's [Caregiver Support Programs](#) (General Caregiver Support Services or Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers) or in any of VA's [Geriatric and Extended Care Services](#) programs may qualify to receive a free Portal device.

Learn more about [PREVENTS](#) and VA's [mental health and suicide prevention](#) efforts.



VA HONORS VETERANS ONLINE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

With the health and safety concerns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Cemetery Administration has adjusted operations in ways they never expected, such as temporarily discontinuing committal services while continuing to provide interments.

In these challenging times, they have launched [a new web page](#), updated daily, which provides the names of those veterans interred in our national cemeteries from the previous day.

We encourage you to visit this page and take moment to honor these veterans.



Roll of Honor

No Veteran Ever Dies: In this time of crisis, VA Remembers those who are being interred in our National Cemeteries



Search Vantage Point

Enter keywords

Search

Veterans Crisis Line



MESSAGE FROM MJFSVH ACTIVITY DIRECTOR

Volunteer Week is fast approaching and under the current circumstances of the COVID 19 Virus, unfortunately we will not be able to have our annual volunteer banquet at this time. However, we have not forgotten our volunteers. Our residents and staff are missing your presence here at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Please accept our utmost thanks and appreciation for all your time and efforts throughout the year in the areas that you volunteer. Without you many events and projects cannot be done. Your contribution of time and attention benefits and improves the lives of our veterans.

Your time and efforts have not been forgotten and we all look forward to seeing you soon. God Bless you all!

Laura Inman, MJFSVH Activities Coordinator

NATIONAL 18-24 MAY 2020
VOLUNTEER
CHANGING COMMUNITIES. WEEK
CHANGING LIVES.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Apr 17—Purple Up Day in South Dakota

May 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
May 10—Mothers Day
May 25—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—MJFSVH Campus—Hot Springs—11:30 am—3:00 pm (MT)
May 25—Memorial Day
May 25—State Offices closed
Jun 3-7—VFW State Convention—Aberdeen
Jun 14—Flag Day
Jun 21—Fathers Day
Jun 27—DAV State Convention—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls
Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
Aug 22—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair
Sep 5—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Sep 19—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9
Oct 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10
Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

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